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. PER ASPERA  
AD ASTRA



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AD ASTRA

*A COLLECTION OF POEMS*

BY

ALEXANDRA VON HERDER



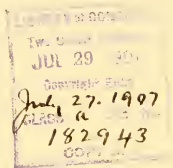
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*To T. de Gunthe*

*On the dawn of the day of your marriage,  
Others will bring you their gold,  
Their jewels, their gems and their silver—  
My hands this book only hold,  
This fragment—but suffer its pages  
To mirror the light of your soul,  
And the greatest of human treasures  
Will gild and transfigure the scroll.*



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ASPERA





Marcus Aurelius on His Death Bed in the Roman  
Camp at Vindobona, during His Campaign  
against the Marcomans, March, A. D., 180

Draw close the curtains of my tent—they're cold  
Those cruel winds of March. How is it with me?  
Disease enthral's me wholly and there is that  
Within me whispers death itself is close  
At hand. What, tears? Nay, nay that is rebellion  
Against a greater prince than I. If He,  
Who sent me here, now bids me go, what cause  
Is there for sorrow? Let Him be satisfied—  
What would ye more? Ye murmur that He called  
Too soon! How should ye know? Is mortal man—  
Who in the boundless stretch of time discerns  
But one small point, the time that is; who owns  
No magic spell wherewith to bind the least  
Swift second of the past, no vision's breadth  
Wherewith to scan the mighty aeons still  
Unborn; who, hardly longer than t'wixt dawn  
And sunset crawls out life upon the clod,  
The narrow clod he calls his world,—is he  
Fit arbiter of what is truly termed  
"Too soon or late"? It is the will of Fate  
To set a term to whatsoever once  
Began; Death is the common lot of all,  
As natural as birth and growth, less strange,  
Less terrible than life. What room were there  
For youth, if age endured for ever? Men die  
So that mankind may live. Mark well the book  
Of Nature. Does it not show the breaking wave  
Dissolve without a sigh upon the shore,  
The rose shed silently its purple crown,  
The ripened olive drop un murmuring  
Unto the ground; and these are soulless things.  
Shall man who has a soul to comprehend,  
Whose spirit is akin to God's, alone  
Revolt against the universal scheme?  
Consider, too, how little happiness  
Mere length of days adds to the mind. I've seen  
Men rich in years, so poor in everything  
That lendeth grace and worth to life, they moved  
My heart to pity; and if I thus perceived  
That all that signifies is not how long,  
But how a human being lives, I learnt  
As well, that this most fragile particle  
Of mind and matter, man, whom sixty years

Of fleeting time drain dry of all his power,  
 Was scarcely fashioned to endure the blaze  
 Of God's Eternity. Our fear of death  
 Is but an appetite for longer life,  
 And like all appetites will lead astray  
 When uncontrolled by reason. O Universe,  
 From whom all things proceed, in whom they all  
 Subsist, and unto whom all must return,  
 If 'tis for thy good that I yield up life,  
 Let no one murmur at my death. So soon,  
 The mourners are as still and cold as those  
 They wept for in their bitterness. To-day  
 I die, to-morrow thou; and shortly all  
 Who ever knew us, hating us or loving,  
 Are vanished like a little smoke, and then  
 This beauteous world, in which we laughed, and hoped  
 And toiled, will scarce remember where our graves  
 Are slowly crumbling into dust. My God!  
 That cruel pang again. How fluently  
 We talk of sickness and calamity,  
 While all is well, but gripped by adverse fate  
 It needeth much philosophy to repress  
 The cry of pain; and thou art weeping? Still?  
 Ah Fronto, noble friend. I know there are  
 Some griefs, to which the loftiest arguments  
 Of reason seem as cold a consolation  
 As for the burdened body is this bleak  
 Barbarian land; and lately—but may be  
 My body's fever bursting bounds, has seared  
 The soul—a doubt, a gnawing doubt, chill, blank,  
 Dissolving as the autumnal mists, which creep  
 And cling among these marsh girt northern woods,  
 Has overcast my inmost thoughts,—a doubt  
 That in the changeful flux of Fate all things  
 Not always alter for the best, that man  
 Is to the great Creative Force no more  
 Than is the lump of clay unto the potter,  
 Who, even as he lists, will mould of this  
 A statue, of that a mean and paltry jar,  
 To be despised or honoured, used and crushed  
 To pieces, according to no higher law  
 Than the accident of chance; yea that our soul  
 Itself, is but a lightning flash of reason  
 Which, for an instant, burns 'midst vortices  
 Of senseless atoms, lost within the womb  
 Of night. A giddy thought! My teachers taught  
 Not so, and I would fain still twine my dreams  
 Round their belief, my worship round their altars,

Around their confidence my hopes; fain, fain,  
 But that I fear it is the cowardice  
 Of weakness thus to cling to hearsay creeds,  
 Instead of gazing out with mine own eyes  
 And with that steadfast boldness which, indeed,  
 Is the only real reverence, far out  
 Into Creation's Mystery. How oft  
 I tried to fill the silence, wherewith God  
 Still answers man's impatient questionings,  
 With guidance of a teacher's voice—in vain!  
 If truth demands, we must unflinchingly  
 Discard beliefs, which strain and split 'neath weight  
 Of fuller knowledge, yea e'en though its stern  
 Command destroy, with scarcely a regret  
 For their lost beauty, all those sweet illusions,  
 Those threads of golden poetry, that hid  
 And bridged the dark abyss of the unknown.  
 Yea, truth is stern and pitiless, but who  
 Shall say if, in the centuries to come,  
 When less constrained by blinding use and custom,  
 Mankind shall not at last discern how far  
 The strong perfection of reality  
 Transcends the painted beauty of its dreams?  
 Yea, who can tell, who know? All-seeing God  
 How Thou must mock or pity us! I prate  
 Of fuller knowledge, and all we hold is scarce  
 A drop out of Thy boundless ocean that—  
 With most, defiled with mud; stern limits set  
 Unto the wisest man's researches; the mind  
 Of Socrates himself imprisoned close  
 By ignorance. Laboriously we build  
 Our grave philosophies, as children pile  
 Their puny heaps of sand and shells, call this  
 A palace, that a fortress, till the sea,  
 With one lap of a lazy wave, wipes all  
 Away and makes the children's playground blank  
 And level as before. Let us not boast  
 Then of a certitude beyond the reach  
 Of finite mind, but humbly walk, with brow  
 Serene and steady foot, the path we know  
 Is good, the path of virtue and of truth.  
 To tread that path is all the God within  
 Demands of us; not to be there, in life  
 Or death, the only evil which subdues  
 The soul of man; and walking thus, as on  
 We move from deepest night to glimmering dawn,  
 Some time perhaps, for some of us the clouds  
 Will lift and through their broken multitudes

Will burst the grand Apocalypse of God!  
Ah, not for me. My part is done for ever—  
That pain again—its work now is soon ended.  
Let no one importune the Gods with prayers  
For my recovery. Behold I die  
A royal death at duty's foremost post  
Of danger, combating my country's foes.  
I'm weary, friends; my soul, like to a bird  
Upon the threshold of dim Night, would close  
Its quivering wings and hush its wealth of music  
Within the silence of untroubled rest.  
Greet Rome, my Rome, for me when you return  
To her from banishment, yea, greet her well,  
And tell her how a Stoic Emperor dies.

## Note to Pope Celestine V.

Celestine V. was Pietro the son of a peasant of Southern Italy. At the age of twenty he had joined the order of the Benedictines, and later retired into the mountains of Apulia, where he lived with a few other hermits who afterwards called themselves Celestines. In 1294 when he was already quite an old man his solitude was broken into by cardinals and archbishops requesting him to exchange his hermit cell for the papal throne. He refused at first, but when Charles II. of Naples and Andrew III. of Hungary joined their entreaties to those of the cardinals, he consented to accept the Tiara. He was, however, profoundly unhappy in his new surroundings, and after a little over two years, disgusted with the worldliness and intrigues rampant at the papal court, he resigned and fled back to his Apulian Mountain solitude. But his successor, Boniface VIII., fearing a schism, caused him to be arrested and thrown into prison, where he died on the 19th of May, 1294, at the age of eighty-one.

## Pope Celestine V.

Ah, take it hence; release me from this crown,  
Which with its treble weight of Earth and Heaven  
And Hell in never opening circles binds  
My brow. Remove it quite! My eyes are dim  
With gazing on the pageantry of life  
For fuller length of years than frail mortality  
Can fitly bear. My weary footsteps faint  
'Neath honours heaped upon me, honours borne  
So badly they have turned to bitter shame.  
Yet Lord! Thou knowest that I sought them not.  
Not mine the fierce ambition that devours  
And goads still upward over wrecks of loves,  
And dreams and friendships till the topmost rung  
Is reached, whence gazing down the world appears  
The toy, the passive plaything of one being  
Intoxicated with applause. Not mine  
The hunger for the sunshine of this world,  
Its blaze of pomp and power, wealth, renown.  
I loved the cool sweet shade of humble life,  
Embowered in peace and solitude, filled full  
With grace, as cup of violet brims with dew.  
And God had granted my desire. The deep  
Seclusion of monastic vows bound fast  
The placid current of my days, which knew  
No other change, but that the sunrise breathed  
"Orate," and the star, whose tremor crowns  
The sunset glow, would whisper "Vigilate."  
I never dreamed but that they still would glide,  
Each like to each rounded with prayer, smooth  
And still as rosary beads; would glide from dawn  
To night, from night to dawn, in sacred, safe  
Monotony even to the longest night  
Of all. O vanity of human thought!  
Ye came, ye whom I know not, ye whom hating  
I never could have hurt as ye hurt me.  
Ye broke the silence of my hermit's cell  
With clash of worldly tongues and cares: "Be Pope!  
"We cardinals have chosen thee." I heard,  
But knowing God had not approved the choice,  
I would not follow at your call. Then kings  
Approached and knelt before me in the dust;  
"Great Anchorite, we know thee pure and just,  
"Without a stain. The Church is sick for dearth  
"Of upright men like thee. Give her thy strength!  
"What does it in this wilderness? Like gold,  
"The miser hides and hoards, it yields mankind  
"No fruit of joy. The Christian world hath need

"Of thee, the Christian world which for two years  
 "In vain has clamoured for a Pope." With these  
 And other reasonings they overwhelmed  
 My hesitance, until perplexed, I half  
 Believed the voice of God spoke with their tongues—  
 I yielded, and they made me Pope. Yea Pope!  
 O had ye known what force for good or ill  
 Lies in that name, mayhap ye would have paused  
 Before ye cast it thus away. Behold  
 These old and trembling hands. Was't right to place  
 Within their feeble grasp the keys of Hell  
 And Heav'n? Was't just to call a helpless man  
 The representative of Christ? What is  
 This thing I call myself, that its least word  
 To multitudes should be command, as though  
 Decreed by God Himself? And ye who flaunt  
 That rash assumption, know full well ye speak  
 A lie. Do ye not daily seek to bend  
 My sovereign power, that it may cringe and curve  
 Along the dark and crooked paths which lead  
 Unto the satisfaction of your own  
 Ungodly aims? Blind leaders of the blind!  
 My soul is sick with all this gorgeousness  
 Of broidered vestments, jewelled mitres, clouds  
 Of incense, crowds of officiating priests  
 Who pray but for their own advancement; chants  
 And services, lip-services, while through  
 Them all, the spirit starves, the famished soul  
 Faints unto death! Are ye the ministers  
 Of God, ye who have even dared debase  
 Repentance and remission of men's sins  
 Into a market-thing to sell and buy?  
 "And what of that? The papal treasury  
 "Gets filled. The world's way."

True, perhaps, but I,

Who fled the world in unmarred youth, abhor  
 These ways and stumble in their tangled maze  
 Of crookedness. O God! For one more breath  
 Of thine own air that blows with strength of freedom  
 Around my rock-bound wilderness: The sun  
 At this last parting hour will flood the vale  
 With heavenly light, and cast a radiant halo  
 Around my wooden crucifix; and then  
 When Night's unbounded stillness hath engulfed  
 The lesser silence of the day, as streams  
 Are lost within the mighty sea's embrace,  
 The moon will rise and wed her virgin beauty  
 Unto the mountains' majesty. My cell,

My lonely hermit's cell, my eagle's nest,  
Perched up so high above the valley's clouds  
And cares, which hears no sound but cry of birds,  
And splash of crystal torrents bounding down  
From rock to rock—let me return, O take  
Me back unto my windswept mountain home,  
Back, where the wearied soul can think and pray!  
Ye shake your heads, ye frown—although ye need  
Me not nor love. Do I not often hear  
You whispering the name of my successor,  
Whom everyone of you in secret strives  
And longs to be? Vainhearted fools! I tell you,  
Sackcloth should be the Pope's dalmatica,  
The tiara should be made of thorns, that men  
Like you, agape for gold and glittering pomp,  
Should ne'er crowd into offices which saints  
Alone can rightly fill. And I, no saint:  
A foolish, weak and broken man, a tree  
Transplanted in old age, which needs must fall  
Because it cannot strike fresh roots. Well, well—  
How I have talked—the shades of evening thicken;  
In but a little, night outlines with black  
The aureoles of the holy figures limned  
Upon the chapel's glass. To vespers then,  
Lord Cardinals, to vespers! From my soul  
I'll murmur: *Nunc dimittis*, Lord, O Lord!"



## A Woman's Face

Angels and demons once fought for her soul,  
Harvests and ruins of years as they roll  
Fell to her lot: adoration and shame,  
Hunger and surfeit, sting of frost and of flame,  
Starkindled dewdreams, thunderbolt flash,  
Rapturous ecstasy, scorpion-tongued lash—  
Of love in his passion lifted and caught her,  
Life-force possessed her, made her and taught her,  
Rent her and spent her! Of both now bereft,  
Desolate, weary, alone she is left,  
Dull as the stretch of the waterless shore.  
Whose barren sands may exult never more  
In whisper and welter and salt of the wave.  
Athwart her brow blows the breath of the grave,  
Cold flows her blood in her stiffening veins,  
Pale are her pleasures, puny her pains,  
The breast is withered, the hair fallen grey—  
But the eyes remember what the lips may not say.

## The Wreck of the "Aden"

'Tis upon us again, the force of the wave,  
Foaming, ferocious, fathomless grave;  
Cling for bare life to the slippery rail  
Bent and twisted by rage of the gale,  
Above us, beneath us, the bottomless sea,  
Lord God of tempests, we cry unto Thee.

Thou alone O Lord, art refuge and stay,  
The winds and the waves Thy power obey,  
We are fainting with fear and horror and pain,  
Who shall escape when the tide comes again?  
Destruction looms hideous, our strength ebbs away,  
Lord God of tempests, save us we pray.

We are Thy children; Thou madest us;  
Have we sinned above others, to perish thus?  
The billows are lashing and rending the deck,  
We scarce still can cling to the quivering wreck,  
Destroy not the life Thy providence gave,  
Lord God of Tempests, save us, O save.

Have mercy upon us, hear us, O Lord,  
Victim on victim is swept overboard,  
Struggles an instant, shrieks and is drowned.  
Haste Thee to succour, be no deaf to the sound  
Of prayers for help! O horrible fear—  
There is no God in the billows to hear.

Monstrous they roar, hungry-mouthed, cruel-lipped,  
Voracious chasms to foam-pools whipped:  
They care not, they know not whose lifeblood they  
spill;  
O mankind, with glory of reason and will,  
Art thou so great then? Behold the blind sea,—  
The fringe of its fury annihilates thee.

Cease then from prayer, give up the fight;  
Though above the sea's strength rule a greater might,  
Men are but creatures and things of a day,  
For the forces of nature to bring forth and slay:  
Tarry not, take us, huge bosomed wave,  
Horrible, world wide, beautiful grave!

## Sunset Off Sandy Hook

A bridge of gold  
Of beauty untold,  
Over ripples unrolled  
'Twixt the ship and the shore.

Over ripples just foaming  
In blue of the gloaming,  
Through which we are roaming  
In quest of the shore.

What would it forebode  
To the wishes which goad  
Across the bleak road  
From cruel home-shore?

Are the waves less bitter,  
As sunbeams they fritter  
To sparkles which glitter  
On bright alien shore?

The sparkles which mould  
The lithe bridge of gold  
For Hope to unfold  
Her flight to the shore.

But the bridge is so frail,  
And hope is so pale,  
Will she not fail  
Before she reach shore?

## Sea Nocturne

Stormclouds lifting and drifting,  
Starlight radiant again,  
Only away to the leeward  
Dreariness, dimness of rain.

Waters open before us,  
Folds of glimmering white,  
Close—a faint hissing of bubbles,  
Broken, submerged in the night.

Onward from shores forgotten  
To harbours none of us know  
We move 'twixt the waves' unfathomed  
And the stars' unsearchable flow.

While in us ideals forsaken  
And goals obscured arise,  
And the wail of the whole world's sorrow  
Through the Wet, through the Infinite cries.

## How Shall We Live?

### *The Birds:*

"How shall we live O Winter?  
We filled the warm depths of the Summer  
With resonance of our songs;  
We caused its sunbeam-flooded skies to kindle  
With winnowing of new-born wings;  
Abundantly we took from Life,  
And abundantly we gave.  
But now—there is a stillness on the meadows,  
And a coldness in the air—  
How shall we live now, Winter?"

### *The Winter:*

"O little children of the Summer,  
What is this, that ye ask of me?  
Is it not enough that ye have lived already,  
Not enough, that high in Heaven  
The music of your songs was heard,  
That from your nests  
A joyful multitude went forth?  
Would ye exceed your destiny,  
And linger on beyond the force  
That made you?  
My little children of the Summer,  
I am Oblivion—I am Death!"

## Prayers

*The Masses.*—"Give us the spacious halls, the sumptuous  
board,

The cars, the ships, the jewellers' hoard,  
Each joy and dalliance gold can buy!"

*The Man.* "Give me the sky!"

*The Masses.*—"Give us importance, power, titles, fame,

Make ours the envied, flattered name  
Before which crowds obsequious bend!"

*The Man.* "Give me a friend."

*The Masses.*—"Spare us Thy thunder's battle strain,

Vouchsafe immunity from pain,  
From clang of deathbells as they toll!"

*The Man.* "Give me the soul!"

## The Shadow on the Dial

Beyond the shadow on the Dial,  
Alternate change of dawn and dusk,  
Shall we from opening of flowers  
And closing of their withered husk,

Conceive the final Mystery,  
Inscrutable to questionings,  
The Impulse, Anguish or the Thought  
Which moves and multiplies all things?

And shall our mind, which made Time's measure,  
With what is measurelessly true  
At last be crowned? Or on the Dial  
Are we but phantom shadows too?

.

## Birth Throe

Silence primeval in Time's folded coil  
And Dimness lay, unwoken yet from sleep  
Than Death's last slumber more profound and deep;  
And Effort was not yet, nor strife and broil  
Of creatures each to each destroyer or spoil,  
And human souls were not to laugh or weep  
And in the mirror of their thoughts to keep  
The fragrance of all harvests of the soil,

Until Creation's dream enflamed that night;  
And since the Silence dreamt of perfect sound,  
And Dimness of the dazzling dawn of light,  
The anguish of their yearning gathered round  
Creation. Now, in each fresh birth her might  
Brings forth, the pain of that first wound is found.



## Retro Me Homine

O steep thy heart in roses,  
Thy soul in song of birds,  
Forget all human faces,  
Unlearn all human words.

They do but moan and mutter,  
Club-footed, rest of wing,  
Into their own mud trampling  
The bounteousness of Spring.

They strangle life with phantoms:  
"Thou shalt not, and thou must,"  
Proclaim as law and virtue  
Their twisted ropes of dust.

Too high for them thy Heaven,  
Too luminous, too blue,  
Too deep the well of gladness,  
Whereto thy yearning flew.

Too wide thy breadth of vision,  
Thy hearing all too keen,  
Too infinite thy knowledge,  
Thy sense of things unseen.

Thy liberty too dazzling,  
Too perilous thy gains;  
Slaves, born and bred in prison,  
Their only faith is chains.

They make it shame and sorrow,  
What should abound with grace—  
The sound of human voices,  
The sight of human face.

From theirs thy paths be severed,  
Let these stand thee for words:—  
The fragrance of wild roses,  
The music of wild birds.

## Nocturne

The day with all its trouble,  
Is dying in the west,  
E'en as a weary flower  
The world droops into rest.

Great stars begin to glisten  
And glimmer into sight,  
So far, so faint, so perfect,  
Like dreams dreamt in the night;

Like hope that draws together  
Those whom the world would part,  
Like love that longs and lingers  
Unuttered in the heart.

## Regret

O fragrance of dark violets that hung  
An instant in the air, O music sung  
Beneath the stars, O hallowed touch  
Of human lips and human hands of such  
Surpassing loveliness, until there rose,  
From off the road of life, the dust which blows  
On all that's sweet; the dust which spares but set,  
Stern task and no companion but regret.

## Cui Bono

What is toil  
From gains forbidden?  
What is day,  
From which is hidden  
Light?

What is hope  
In worlds unbettered?  
What is patience  
Roughly fettered  
To Despair?

What is sleep  
By dreams forsaken?  
What is life  
From which is taken  
Love?

## For a Little

O come and tarry by my fireside,  
The evenings are long and grey—  
Thy voice is music in the twilight,  
O for a little, come and stay!

I have been sad and passing weary  
All through the hard, the lonely day—  
Thy hand is soothing in the twilight,  
O for a little, come and stay!

There is a world, the world knows nought of,  
Beyond its envy hid away—  
Deep in the silence of the twilight,  
O my beloved, come and stay!

## Among the Flowers

Among the flowers of the summer,  
When first thy face appeared to me,  
Through all the dreaminess of summer,  
Among the flowers, I yearned for thee.

Among the thorns which Fate and hardness  
Of thine own heart 'twixt thee and me  
Still scattered for my feet to bleed on,  
Among the thorns, I lived for thee.

Below the moss, the moss untrodden,  
When I am nothing more to thee,  
I shall be healed in dreamless slumber  
From all the wounds thou gavest me.

## Star Song

Far, so far,  
Lonely star,  
Hidden half  
In a cloud,  
Cloud as heavy  
As a shroud.

Far, so far,  
Beauteous star  
Of the evening  
Of my days,  
All thy rays  
Hidden quite  
Out of sight  
In the loneliness  
Of night.

Wilt thou come  
Once again,  
Sweet as sunshine  
After rain?  
Bright as gleams  
Through my dreams  
In the loneliness  
Of night

The remembrance  
Of thy light,  
Star, my star,  
Now so far?

## The Last Trek

Strike camp now boys, pack what biltong is left,  
Load up the waggon; inspan the team, trek  
To the North; you'll find the gold yet. I stop here,  
I'm too done now to ride; the jolt in the waggon  
Finished me up. Ye'd wait? Our stock's too low.  
Leave me; 'tis best. I know what 'tis to be tied  
To deadweights. Curse the whole lot. I'll not pay  
This dirty world back in its own base coin.  
There's a hell of pride ablaze in me yet. I lived  
Alone; alone I shall die. Drop it, your pity.  
Human pity's too close to contempt, Death  
Ain't so dreadful looked square in the eye; the last  
Pons Asinorum we've all got to cross.  
I'm all right. But ye might just hitch up that blanket  
A bit, and shift the pillow; my neck's kind  
Of cricked. Here, take my watch—I've done with time.  
My money, too—Don't spend it in drink. Then leave  
Me here beneath the sky, so cool now, so calm,  
He almost seems kind. And His stars and I  
We'll have our last palaver out. Lor, how  
They lied! Don't they twinkle like rogues? Maybe  
My bearings were out; still I swear, that they vowed,  
If only I always stuck to their lead,  
They'd surely land me in Paradise. . . . They sink,  
And I—well two hours still at most; a lame  
Flat end to a thirty years' trek. Not even  
A grave. You mustn't wait to shovel me in.  
The birds can have me; they get hungry too.  
To the last, I'd turn my eyes to the light. I'll get  
My fill of the dark, had darkness enough.  
The hells I've been through, the worries, the cares!  
How I groused and cursed, prayed to Devils and Gods  
I didn't believe in! It let off steam,  
Was useful at that. Helped? Not much. Luck helps.  
I used to fancy work did, honesty,  
Patience, all that copybook stuff. It does—  
For some. Some fellows score before they've bowled.  
I lose my wicket for scarcely a run,  
The bowling and batting ain't twice just alike,  
The rules, too, differ in every man's game.  
That makes it so hard. Still a hard game's good,  
If only the Umpire always were fair.  
He is? Bosh. Wait and play your deadlevel best  
Through the blazing noon, then find yourself stumped  
By the cowardly lie of a blackguardy cur—  
Grousing, eh? Kind of foolish now, when all's



Too late. Ah well—it eased the pain in the chest  
 Awhile. I won't deny I scored some too;  
 Had some rattling good times, got Kudos and fun:  
 Life's grand at its worst. Size up evil and good,  
 They're plentiful both and much more akin  
 Than parsons'd say. I've sampled most things, fruit  
 Forbidden and lawful: there's wormwood in both,  
 And ashes at last. That's why I went under?  
 Rot. Look at that Jew swine. He's a success.  
 He forged, embezzled, starved his brother to death,  
 A wrong 'un right through; yet his wife's a shop  
 Of Kimberly ware, his mistresses too.  
 He'll soon be a lord. I worked—I am here. Luck,  
 That's it. Fate's cruel? No. Just fond of gamblin'  
 With loaded dice, and the Boss of the show,  
 How he must laugh when a puppet's heartstring sudden  
 Goes fut. Broken hearts not the fashion? That's so,  
 But courage run dry, sheer physical strength  
 Used up in the fight, pride and trust in one's work  
 Clean gone, that ain't played out, that's brought me here  
 Low in the thorns and dust of the veldt. What, grousing  
 Again? Give us a drop then. Here's to you boys,  
 Good luck, good luck. That's all there's in it:  
 'Twent against me badly, but who cares now?  
 Exceptin' the vultures—They'll find so little  
 To pick off my bones. Hallo—there's the dawn:  
 Twelve miles to cover before it gets hot.  
 Time ye were off. Good bye, shake hands, though hands  
 Mean little to me, since the one small hand  
 I worshipped like God, slipped from my grasp and wounded  
 Me most. What story's that? A secret? Yes.  
 'Twill die with me, as a secret should. But you  
 Are friends. True, capital friends, still there was  
 An hunger in me you couldn't feed, a scar,  
 The kindest touch would startle to pain. And so  
 It's best as it is. It's all for the best.  
 Any message to send? No, I'll not bother  
 A soul. Death comes to all—life's last little joke,  
 A good one perhaps. I'll know pretty soon,  
 That's something—only—only—if I could  
 First have done what 'twas in me to do.—Bad luck.



ASTRA



## Catholicity

I worship in a temple of a thousand shrines;  
Unto its portals lead a thousand roads,  
And at the passing of a thousand winds  
A thousand bells of gold begin to chime.

There are a thousand gods upon the altars  
Veiled with a thousand shades and lights, adored  
By murmur of a thousand prayers couched  
In a thousand modes of speech. A thousand clouds  
Of incense from a thousand silver censers  
Swung from a thousand silver chains, float round  
Them, and a thousand candles burn. Yet are  
They all one God, my God, sometimes so close,  
He seems myself; so far again, the faint  
Trail of the Milky Way might be the breathing  
Of His mouth. He has received a thousand names,  
Yet is He nameless; a thousand shapes, yet hath  
He none. He is the shadow of a dream,  
The glamor of a rainbow on the void,  
The elusiveness of music, breath profound  
Of inspiration, fugitive delight  
Of peace, whisper of infinitude, Man's  
Apotheosis! And lo—He is the yearning  
Of the dreamer, the anguish of the unattained,  
The hunger and the sorrow of the soul.

I worship in a temple of a thousand shrines,  
Unto its portals lead a thousand roads,  
And at the passing of a thousand winds  
A thousand bells of gold begin to chime.

## The Solitary Column of Karnak

Lotus-crowned pillar! since thy leaves of stone  
Were by an ancient sculptor raised on high,  
Into thy calyx gazed no mortal eye:  
Celestial orbs' undying rays alone  
Now touch and gild thee, even like a throne,  
From which the sad-browed queen—pale Memory—  
Speaks to the constellations of the sky  
Of things they shone upon—great things unknown  
To all but them and thee, proud shaft!—Spell-bound  
I linger near thee, till that symphony  
Thou pourest forth, that music—where the sound  
Of old Egyptian glories passed away  
With yesterday's warm breath is interwound,—  
Thrills through my soul in mystic harmony.

## The Central Altar in the Temple of Heaven, Peking

Enduring verdure of tall cypress-tree,  
Glazed lazuli of lustrous tiles deep wrought  
Magnificence of alabasters brought  
Together in concentric rows of three  
Complete the glorious altar, wide and free  
To every grandeur of the sky, with nought  
Of roof or pillar to imprison thought  
As upwards it exults, O Heaven, to Thee.

No dogma cult, no reverence of fear,  
No graven image, no unworthy tear,  
Insight alone of him who is a seer  
Is suffered to officiate at this shrine  
Whose perfect harmony of light and line  
Creates on Earth, through Earth, the Soul Divine.

## An Atlantic Liner

Water destroys man, space wearies his feet;  
Yet space and water his mastery feel  
O'erborne, o'erruled by swift forefoot and keel  
Of the moving ship in whose engine room meet  
Propeller and piston, bolt, rod, shaft and wheel,  
Giant anatomy moulded in steel  
With heart of fire and pulsation of heat.

Man's work alone! His the brain cell to scheme,  
The supple hand to embody the dream,  
The will no peril unconquered to leave,  
Through all resistances progress to cleave,  
Dead weight of iron, evanescence of steam  
Curbed and compelled his behests to achieve.



## Mount Everest

Alone, alone, deep-cushioned in the sky,  
The long waves of Infinitude forever  
Eddying around his brow, the height supreme  
Of circling Earth in wide elliptic curve  
Is swung through boundless space. He, first to seize  
The quivering radiations flushed and flung  
From that great cup of throbbing gold which brims  
To overflowing with the intoxicating wine  
Of light—the glorious Sun. He, last to plunge  
Away from Day's transcendent crimson down  
Into the liquid lazuli of Night;  
There to commune unseen with magnetisms  
In threads invisible spun from the stars;  
The Chariot wheels above him, meteors flash  
Their instant triumph past him through the void;  
Oceans waft their longing towards him, dank trails  
Of moisture poised, precipitated round  
His crags in crystals of pellucid snow.  
They cling to him, a crown of royal splendour,  
Until the hungerpower of the deep  
Drags them reluctant down with muttered roar  
Of avalanche. Spring comes not unto him  
Nor summer. Unbroken has he kept his faith  
To Winter of remotest time. The fierce,  
Keen cold of the abyss has bitten hard  
Into his heart. No life, as we know life,  
Invades his peace; but for the whirl of wind  
And cloud all motion here were petrified.  
And yet—when silver radiance of the moon  
Impinges on the glimmering ice and quartz,  
Who knows but that the mountain-summit's soul  
Yearns not across the ether—dreaming, e'en  
As all those silent things which we call dead,  
In their stupendous loneliness may dream?

## The Desert

Huge Desert, parched thy sand-drifts, and thy stones  
Unfruitful; the secrets of beginnings, sad  
With silences of ends, are sealed within  
Thy soul. Waste thou art called and useless dust,  
Because thy void to man's voraciousness  
No harvest yields but pang of hunger, craze  
Of thirst. Thou only hast triumphantly  
Withstood the foul pollution of his yoke  
Wherewith the earth is seared, till all her streams  
Must turn his wheels, her quarried mountains bleed  
Their ore, her forests fall to roof his hut.  
But thou, O desert, art the watcher calm,  
And final overwhelmer of his pride.  
Thy sombre strength is like unto the strength  
Of ultimate foundations. The burn and blaze  
Of every sunbeam of the day thou takest,  
And all the stinging iciness of night,  
Untempered, unalloyed by veil of cloud  
Or verdure, naked, proud, fierce, unafraid,  
Hard to the very core of thee. The wind  
Alone, whose wings, beyond the rolling globe,  
Sweep the abysmal ether, may breathe on thee,  
And mould the surface motion of thy sands;  
But his force, too, sinks broken on thine heart  
Unbreakable. So deeply hast thou drunk  
Of death, forever now thou art immune.  
Change, keenest despot of Creation, deals  
Not with thee, and his relentless ally, Time,  
Halts on the threshold of thy realm. Great Kings  
Of old in thee have raised their sepulture,  
And Empire-builders of to-day, near thee  
Have craved to rest their bones. Thou mighty One,  
Well-nigh eternal and immutable,  
Home of the hermit, healer of the mind  
Sore with the pettiness of human aims,  
Mine, where the iron for the sure destruction  
Of lying values of the crowd, has been  
And ever shall be forged; thou simple One,  
Light thy sole ornament, and Space, dread symbol  
Of Infinity, lifeless, loveless, lone  
And free; profoundest Dreamer of the far  
To-morrow, of long forgotten yesterdays,  
Art thou but soulless sand, or that strange thing  
Inscrutable and unknown still, where matter  
With seed of spirit-strength so teems, the two  
Seem one, the spirit—child of matter, matter—  
The mother, patient with a wayward child?

## The Rain Cloud

With all the jewelry of rainbows girt,  
Borne sheer above huge mountains on the wings  
Of western winds, the cloud sheds down its wealth  
Of moisture on the parched, the famished soil:  
And lo the glory of the rainbow melts,  
The very being of the fruitful cloud  
Dies, dissolved, destroyed, devoured by that great deed  
Of bounty, nourishing the famished soil.

## The Sunset Cloud

Thou great and mellow evening cloud, uplifted  
Into effulgence of the Sun, wast thou  
The swiftly speeding surface of some strong  
And restless stream, the storm-tossed foam of wild  
Salt seas, the smoothly silent mirror  
Of silver willows round a pond? Aflame  
Now, kindled into ecstasy of light,  
For one supreme and perfect consummation  
No more a cloud; a dazzling incandescence,  
A burning aureole of gold.

And then,  
When night extinguishes thy splendour, Earth  
Will draw thee back to her dark heart as dew,  
And through the heaviness of shadows thou  
Wilt whisper echoes of thine hour of gold.

## Sanctuary

O gold of all the sunsets spilt, since Earth  
Has first been sung to sleep; O silver stream  
Of all the moons in midnight memories  
Enshrined; O sweetness of the almond blossom  
Swaying in the azure sky; O warmth benign  
Of the comradeship of friends, ye are my home,  
My happiness, my peace; the flame, the fragrance  
And the flower in the dimness of the world,  
The sanctuary across whose threshold hate  
And anger may not pass, where Joy alone  
Spreads wide the beauteous rapture of its wings;  
Where obscure yearnings of creation swell  
Into majesty of thought; where all that seemed  
So separate, grows one, and all that seemed  
So mortal—a symbol of Eternal Life.

## Resurrection

They troubled the earth a little,  
To hide a coffin away,  
And sorrow wept there a little,  
Then passed and faded away.

Now Earth is splendid with sunshine,  
And strength and sweetness of spring,  
From depths of her in the sunshine  
Soft grass and violets spring

Yea everywhere through the sunshine  
The resurrection of life,  
Even where they hid from the sunshine  
The pitiful waste of a life.

## Evolution

Afar on the western horizon  
Over fragrance of harvest-clad fields,  
The sun his last flashing of crimson  
In passionate ecstasy yields.  
Darkness and dimness thicken,  
But beyond the shadow—behold,  
Effulgence of worlds without ending,  
The Universe fashioned in gold.

Great worlds which are long extinguished,  
And worlds which labour to grow  
From vortex of nebular radiance,  
Coalesce in one quivering glow,  
Reveal what cannot be fathomed,  
Dimensions thought cannot attain,  
And distances wherein all measures  
Of human experience fall vain;

Where Time is felt to be nothing  
But Eternity as it revolves,  
And Space the limit that ever  
In the limitless dies and dissolves;  
Where all that we deem so sure  
Of verdicts of evil and right,  
The standards and flags multi-coloured  
Round which we struggle and fight;

Shrink to fables stammered by children,  
And Heaven itself seems a sigh  
Of weariness, far too mortal  
To span that splendour on high,  
That Power, which riots and revels  
In restlessness, struggle and strife,  
Whose Nadir is death and destruction,  
Whose Zenith is Progress and Life.

## Benedicite Ver

The Spring, the Spring!  
Bless ye the Spring!  
His breath is Beauty,  
His lips are Love,  
His eyes a Glory  
A blessing his hands,  
Fruitfulness marketh the path of his feet.  
Spring is a poem written by God,  
His bounty's apocalypse,  
The heavenly harmony angels sing,  
The angels who dwell in the heart of all things,  
The angels, who render this earth so fair,—  
Bless, bless ye the Spring!



## Spring

Fling to me violets,  
Bring to me May,  
Cling to me sunshine,  
Sing to me birds,  
Ring to me royally blue-bell chime  
Spring! I am Spring! the life kindling time!

## Birds

By the brink of the lake,  
Where leaves are so green,  
And the sky and its blueness  
Can scarcely be seen,  
The birds are calling, are calling.

Over waters asleep,  
Just rippled by leap  
And silverswift splash  
Of fishes which flash,  
The birds are calling, are calling.

Twixt grasses of summer,  
From flower to flower,  
Through golden green twilight  
Of drowsy noon-hour,  
The birds are calling, are calling.

In thicket half-hidden,  
On branches on high,  
With bright-coloured wing  
Spread wide 'gainst the sky,  
The birds are calling, are calling.

And surely thou knowest  
The sweet sounding name  
My lips in soft cadence  
To their love song would frame,  
As the birds are calling, are calling.

## Summer Harvest

It rose the first promise of springtide,  
It grew with the growth of the days,  
It gathered into its greenness  
All the gold and the glory of rays;

It rippled in glittering sparkles  
With the laughing gladness of light;  
It breathed in tremulous whispers  
'Neath the passionate darkness of night;

It fed on the heat of the sunshine;  
It drank of the coolness of rain,  
And now it is cut down and gathered—  
The straw and the chaff and the grain;

It is piled up in tall sheaves of plenty,  
The wage wherewith Summer and soil  
Reward in bounteous profusion  
The sweat of the labourer's toil.

And I who have toiled not nor laboured,  
Who idled through long summer days,  
Who breathed the scent of wild flowers  
Who roamed over untrodden ways,

Who tasted strange fruit, sweet and bitter;  
Who have culled so much pleasure and pain,  
Now 'tis come the time of the harvest:  
I must count the loss and the gain.

The Reckoning Angel is standing  
Where autumn mists cover my path;  
Will the depths of his eyes smile in favour,  
Or frown upon me in wrath?

Is there aught in my hands save the stubble  
And chaff to be burnt into dust?  
Have I gathered but worldly treasure  
For the thief, and the moth and the rust?

Nay! Behold of these it is empty,  
My summerdays' harvested store;  
I have reaped a heavenly treasure—  
The soul of one friendship the more!

## Sic Transit

Just a falling to seed among flowers,  
A tinge of gold in the leaves,  
And the wheat, where the warm winds rippled,  
Gathered up into motionless sheaves.

Just a darkening of the shadows,  
A gradual waning of light,  
A deepening and a prolonging  
Of the exquisite coolness of night;

Just a lingering in soft hollows  
Of the diamond sparkle of dew,  
A pearly and delicate veiling  
Of the luminousness of the blue.

The summer seems sweeter than ever,  
Thus pierced with the sting of decay,  
If Death is always so tender,  
Why murmur when passing away?

## Though It Be Death

Sheer on the snow exultant day:  
Beneath the ardor of his breath,  
To sparkle like the sun's own ray  
Is it not joy though it be death?

Thus on my mouth thy lips' strong seal:  
Beneath the fervor of thy breath  
The loss of my whole soul to feel,  
Is it not life though it be death?

## To a Young Girl

Red the bright beads of thy necklace,  
Red the tissue of thy dress  
Red thy cheek's and mouth's soft outline,  
White thy maiden loneliness.

Red the flicker of the firelight,  
Where midst dancing of the flame,  
And faint dropping of the embers,  
Thou dost read the far one's name;

Where thine eyes aglow with laughter  
Of the child unused to fears,  
Darkening though with dim foreboding  
Of the woman's bitter tears,

Seem to see with keener brightness  
Than the keen delight and strife  
Of red flametongues round the firewood,  
Red the reddest rose of life.

And a wonder steals upon thee,  
And a yearning and a dread  
Lest some day between thy fingers  
It should lie discrowned and dead,

Lest of all its wealth of fragrance,  
All its promise, all its lure,  
Some day nothing but the sorrow  
And the heartache should endure.

Fear not child: Love's root lies deeper  
Than the flowering of one May,  
Something to thy soul is added  
For each petal blown away.

Thou art one of those who kindle,  
From the dawning of their birth,  
With the joyfulness of beauty  
All the misery of earth;

Who from height of their ideals  
Heaven's glory round us shed:  
White thy gentle soul forever,  
Red thy soft lips, warm and red.

## To Ruth

Could I pluck from the sun its heart of gold,  
From virgin mines their treasures untold,  
And then in figurings lavish and bold  
Upon the canvas glowing unfold  
This magic wealth, would it half be told  
With all the splendour and radiance there,  
Wherein amber, ruby and topaz share,  
The exquisite sheen of thine auburn hair?

## Immortality

I dreamed I had been dead a thousand years,  
And that the wastage of a thousand years  
Had been piled up upon my grave. The leaves  
And grasses of a thousand summers had drawn  
The sweetness from the upper air, and down  
Through mellow transformations they had drifted  
To nourish roots of trees struck straight through mould  
And mildew of my sunken coffin-lid,  
The coffin planks disjoined, dissolved, dropped back  
To dimness inorganic. All my bones  
Denuded from the ligaments of flesh  
But crumbling heaps of bloodless dust. I was  
No more a thing apart, but soil of soil  
And clay of clay, absorbed, and yet endowed  
With wondrous senses, seeing, without eyes  
In darkness, hearing without ears, in silence,  
Feeling without hands, in isolation.  
Being wholly dead, I was immortal. Change,  
Decay, disintegration, phantoms pale  
Of dream-lost days; the prison consciousness  
Of self with putrefaction of the flesh  
Destroyed; the unfolding of Eternity  
Through Time thenceforth my sole pulsation; peace  
Of knowledge absolute, my only thought;  
The might and dark magnificence of that  
Whereon destruction dies, my godlike soul!

I dreamed I had been dead a thousand years  
And that the harvests of a thousand years  
Had weighed and slowly wasted on my grave.





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